

# Foreword: MDGs in Longer-Term Perspective – A Personal Reflection

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This *IDS Bulletin*, with thinking and proposals from researchers and activists of the global South raises several issues about the post-2015 agenda which are not yet part of general debate. I want to reinforce the new ideas by adding five points setting them in longer-term perspective.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), although far from comprehensive in their approach to development, represented a major step forward internationally. Never before had so many countries, North and South, agreed on a core of goals for human advance and poverty reduction. The colonial world of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries had nothing remotely like them. The United Nations Charter in 1945 declared that the UN shall 'promote higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress' along with solutions to international economic, social, health and related problems (and respect for and observance of human rights) but with no specifics. From 1960 onwards, the UN did agree some 50 goals for economic and social development but until the MDGs, such goals had never been accepted by the Bretton Woods Institutions. The MDGs in these respects pioneered an international consensus about the way forward.

Second, the significance of the MDGs lies in the way they have broadened the concerns and objectives of global governance. Some view the MDGs as little more than a North–South agreement on next steps for aid. But in the twenty-first century world of increasing globalisation, the MDGs can also be seen as bringing human concerns into the objectives which the global economic and social system should achieve. From this perspective, the fact that the MDGs will only be partly achieved by the target dates and that not all countries have taken them seriously is of less long-term significance than the fact that they were agreed,

much action was taken, and that serious debate is now under way internationally about what should follow.

Third, exploring the post-2015 agenda raises major issues about the world of 2030 and beyond, the longer-term perspectives and broader challenges of the twenty-first century. Surely post-2015 goals should include some relating to development in richer, developed countries? Goals for sustainability have already been formulated in Rio and some governments and NGOs are pressing for integrating them into the post-2015 goals and targets. Ideally, they should include goals and targets for such priorities as reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, conserving energy use, as well as exploring changes in lifestyles and reductions in material consumption in developed countries – for ending austerity, reducing poverty and embarking on a path of sustainable recovery?

Fourth, the world needs to move beyond the outdated North–South divide. The rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the relative standing of the different regions of the world, politically as well as economically, underline the need for moving to perspectives which present the world as a truly universal entity. Even if it is not yet possible to agree global goals or targets, monitoring and analysis can be undertaken to track the human as well as the economic and social dimensions of change, universally as well as regionally and nationally. Within regional perspectives, special attention should be paid to the vulnerable country categories, the Least Developed Countries and the small island and landlocked countries.

Finally, reform of the international system of global governance needs to be on the post-2015 longer-term agenda. The issues may be too complex and controversial for immediate negotiation but many are ripe for exploration, analysis and research, especially by institutions

from different parts of the world, working together in active partnership. The post-1945 world was not afraid to explore bold ideas about universal human rights, Keynesian strategies for full employment, gross national product monitoring on a global scale and international policies for economic and social advance. The post-2015 debates are an opportunity for

embarking once again on courageous thinking, creative research, controversial debate and careful monitoring – but this time with eyes open to broader perspectives and ears listening to voices from all parts of the world.

Sir Richard Jolly  
Honorary Professor and Research Associate of IDS

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## **What are the Millennium Development Goals?**

- Goal 1** Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
  - Goal 2** Achieve Universal Primary Education
  - Goal 3** Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
  - Goal 4** Reduce Child Mortality
  - Goal 5** Improve Maternal Health
  - Goal 6** Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases
  - Goal 7** Ensure Environmental Sustainability
  - Goal 8** Develop a Global Partnership for Development
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